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BETWEEN IRAQ AND A HARD PLACE: US POLICY TOWARD IRAQ

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The US is in the midst of an extraordinary national debate concerning the appropriate policy mix with which to address the challenges posed by Iraq. The iterative presentation of the US Administration's approach to "settling" the Iraq question lends itself to measurement against a decision model that factors in policy ends, means, ways, constraints, opportunities, costs, and risks to determine if all critical variables have been considered and properly weighted in the US decision process. Using such a decision template, this paper will propose that the US approach to Iraq should focus primarily on curtailing Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program through a sequential mix of coercive diplomacy and limited military force as required. Such an approach is most likely to achieve relevant US national security objectives while minimizing the US cost in lives and treasure.

INTERNATIONAL AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

An analysis of US decision-making must begin with the international environment in which the US operates. The defining feature of the international system is the US role as the only superpower. In comparative measures of wealth, the nearly $10 trillion economy of the US exceeds that of any competitor by a factor of two and US military outlays equal the combined total of the next eight largest defense budgets. (Nye, 35-36) In broader terms, the prevalence of US commercial products overseas, the recognized preeminence of American universities, the use of English as *lingua franca* for international discourse, and US agenda-setting in international fora all provide a reservoir of "soft power" to complement US predominance in economic and military measures of national strength.

But the statistical catalogue of US prowess has not permitted the US to exclusively set the ground rules for the global community. Translating indices of raw national power

into equally large measures of influence globally is an imperfect process and particularly difficult if the exercise of that power is perceived as overly self-interested or heavy-handed, a charge leveled against the US with increasing frequency in recent years. The Ottawa treaty banning landmines, the Kyoto treaty on global warming, and the establishment of an International Criminal Court are all examples of the potential for US preferences to be sidelined by an international consensus on issues of transnational importance.

These challenges to US authority do not signal an accelerating decline, but they do create diplomatic friction that has a measurable impact on the time and effort needed by the US to persuade states to support, or at least not obstruct, the US agenda on important issues such as crafting an acceptable UN Security Council resolution on Iraq. Ironically, US ambivalence toward full-fledged participation in various global institutions may have eroded Washington's ability to turn to those bodies for support when it needs them (witness the damage to US credibility done by the running battle over UN dues' paying in recent years).

US reticence to accept rules, constraints, and institutional mandates has fed international concerns about a US predilection for unilateral action in its global dealings. A dismissive attitude toward the inputs of allies and partners or a failure to properly reward support from other states can eventually lead to resentment in important capitals (Moscow being a prominent case currently). (Washington Post) This phenomenon of alienation parallels another notable trend in international affairs: the sense of Muslim grievance and victimization, particularly among Arab peoples, in their relations with the West.

The most potent catalyst for Arab hostility toward the West, and the US especially, is Washington's strong ties and support for Israel. (Perlez) While most Arab leaders are grudgingly reconciled to Israel's existence, the perception of Israeli delay in establishing a

sovereign political entity for Palestinians has laid bare the extent to which the Arab nations do not control events in their own region and serves as a reminder of collective Arab weakness in the face of Western power. Cultural, political, and religious mores have done more than purported US or Western conspiracies to hamstring the development of Arab nations but blaming the US for these failings distracts attention from homegrown responsibility. (Lewis, 152-53)

Overall, the international and strategic setting is a mixed bag for the US; Washington has amazing stores of political, economic, and military capital. But it must nurture a stronger sense of international community through dialogue and demonstrate a greater willingness to adjust timelines and policy tools to achieve a workable consensus on issues such as Iraq.

US HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

The US historical and cultural context is important because it forms the psychological scaffolding for the thought processes and policy approaches of US leaders. Key elements of the US context are the beliefs that: 1) wars are aberrations that should be prosecuted expeditiously to allow a quick return to the equilibrium conditions of peace and international cooperation (McDougall, 213); and 2) America's borders, insulated by the strategic depth of two oceans, are inviolable and therefore wars are events that occur overseas, far from the US.

These guideposts of the American psyche have figured either directly or implicitly in the pronouncements of US political leaders since the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Downplaying traditional conceptions of a clearly demarcated and linear conflict, the Administration has tried to reshape public expectations on the nature and timeline of this war and its relationship to everyday life. US officials have emphasized the likelihood of long periods of unobserved preparatory work punctuated by sharp bouts of violent action that

could stretch into the indefinite future. (Powell, 18) The shadowy, protean nature of this struggle clearly poses a challenge to US leaders, who must continue to demonstrate measurable progress even when conventional indices of success are hard to produce.

The most dramatic shift in the US psychological landscape comes from an awareness of homeland vulnerability. The attacks of 9/11 stripped away the sense of distance and protection from mortal threats that the US has historically enjoyed in its continental vastness. This discomfiting sense of vulnerability has and will have profound implications for how the US defends itself in the future.

During the last century, the US drew a distinct lesson from its painful experiences in two world wars; Washington recognized that it could not withdraw from the messy political and security issues convulsing the world but had to play a leading role in building the international architecture to collectively defuse those issues and thereby protect US security interests. A divergent lesson seems to have emerged in the aftermath of 9/11 – that the international architecture (e.g., the UN, World Bank, IMF, NATO) is now often too unwieldy in safeguarding US security against threats that emerge in the seams of the traditional nation-state system and that unilateral action, or more focused cooperation with selected states outside existing frameworks, is often the best and swiftest guarantee of national security.

The cumulative effect of these historical and cultural factors has been to create a powerful political imperative for the US Administration to take the offensive on security matters. As the case of Iraq demonstrates, the scope of such action is not limited to countering manifest threats but also extends to smothering latent ones. The train of logic leading to preemptive action has a strong resonance given the potential destructiveness of the enemy's weapons and al Qaeda's focus on US territory as the preferred battleground. The

question remains whether this logic applies in the case of Iraq; whether the template for action devised for use against international terrorism is easily overlaid on the complex set of security issues knotted together in Iraq.

US STRATEGIC ENDS TOWARD IRAQ

Iraq has been a nagging security concern of the US for more than twelve years. Until 9/11, Iraq was a regional nuisance, worthy of close monitoring and occasional punitive strikes, but not a first order threat to the US. However, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks against the US, the Administration viewed Saddam Hussein through a new threat prism and constructed a rationale for seeking his removal from power by force.

The major line of argument has focused on Hussein's past ties to global terrorists and his efforts to expand Iraq's inventory of WMD capabilities by adding nuclear weapons. The Administration has argued that the current risk environment, the devastating potential of the weapons involved, and the prospect of Iraq's future collusion with terrorist enemies of the US create an overwhelming imperative to act swiftly to neutralize Iraq as a security challenge. An analysis of US security objectives can help determine if this threat framework is relevant in the case of Iraq.

The US has several explicit security objectives in crafting its policy toward Iraq: 1) ensuring that Iraq and international terrorist groups, particularly al Qaeda and its affiliates, do not forge tactical alliances; 2) sustaining regional stability and the steady flow of oil by preventing Iraq from threatening or attacking its neighbors; 3) preventing Iraq from obtaining a nuclear weapons capability and, to a lesser extent, curtailing other WMD activity; 4) building greater support for US security goals within the international community and especially among Arab and other wary Muslim nations.

The primacy of counter terrorism goals in the hierarchy of US security values certainly has relevance in setting policy toward Iraq. Terrorists operate as stateless individuals, but still need to situate themselves on the territory of some state. In Iraq, the possibility of Hussein's support for terrorist organizations is a disturbing prospect, given their shared hatred of the US and the material resources Hussein could provide to the global terrorists. However, to date, the evidence of collusion between al Qaeda and Iraq is inconclusive; no evidence links Iraq to any of the major terrorist attacks conducted by al Qaeda and no intelligence reporting has been produced to indicate that such links are in the making. (Pena, 6)

The prospect of such an alliance remains a possibility, but the ideological underpinnings of such an odd coupling would probably make it short-lived and volatile. Al Qaeda is a radical Muslim fundamentalist group with a worldwide scope for its terrorist acts. It has no territory to defend, no fixed assets to protect, and answers to no traditional political master. Hussein, on the other hand, is a very secular leader of a vulnerable state with pretensions to regional greatness and a pathological need to exert total control over people and assets within his grasp. It is highly improbable that Hussein would provide resources to al Qaeda so that it could launch attacks the timing and nature of which the Iraqi leader did not control, for an agenda that is ultimately inimical or irrelevant to his interests, against an overwhelming foe that is looking for a *casus belli* to remove him forcibly from power.

While an Iraqi-al Qaeda latch-up does not appear to be an imminent danger, Hussein's efforts to establish himself as a regional hegemon have not been abandoned, only deferred. Nothing in Hussein's behavior or his state's internal structure indicates that he would forgo an aggressive program of conquest if allowed to reconstitute his military forces.

A resurgence of Hussein's wrecking ball approach to regional politics would be as destabilizing and threatening to US interests in the Gulf now as it was in 1990-91.

Hussein's proximate desire to control a greater portion of Middle Eastern oil reserves would give him an intolerably large voice in determining the tempo of world economic activity and would provide the resources to fuel his more ambitious designs for regional domination and primacy in the Arab world. However, Hussein's ambitions are not matched by comparable capabilities: the UN sanctions regime and US-led containment efforts have squeezed Hussein's military forces. Hussein's capacity for external aggression has been blunted and the risk of a military move against his neighbors is negligible.

The US Administration has asserted that Hussein intends to bridge the distance between his desiderata and his capabilities by acquiring a nuclear weapon. It is prudent to assume that Hussein is still pursuing a nuclear capability and that it would likely take from one to six years for him to achieve this goal depending on whether he smuggles in weapons-grade uranium or must develop the infrastructure to produce it himself. (Gordon) While the US has a keen interest in preventing Iraq from acquiring a nuclear capability, it is worth asking what the possible consequences would be if Hussein did secure such a weapon.

The assumption of US political leaders is that Hussein's quest for a nuclear weapon is intolerable; from a practical policy perspective, that stance is a reasonable one in mobilizing international policing efforts to prevent Hussein from succeeding in this pursuit. However, the level of exertion and risks the US is willing to take to counter Hussein's nuclear efforts should be based on a clear-headed appraisal of how Iraq would likely use such a weapon to further its aggressive agenda. In Iraq's case, a nuclear weapon would be most potent in conjunction with conventional forces that had the capability to seize territory and confront

opponents with a *fait accompli*. The gains from another successful invasion of Kuwait, for instance, could be protected under the umbrella of a declared Iraqi nuclear threat to dissuade the international community from attempting to restore the *status quo ante bellum*. The onus would then be on the US to court nuclear conflict by initiating a war to expel Iraq. At present though, Iraq does not possess the option of a surprise conventional attack because of US capabilities in the region and relatively meager Iraqi conventional forces.

The only other viable option for Iraq would be to declare its nuclear capability and then demand that it be granted control of Kuwait (or Saudi or Iranian oil fields). This blackmail scenario would be far less promising because it would place the burden on Hussein of carrying through on his threat when his demands were not fulfilled. Given that Hussein has no long-range delivery system, he would have to resort to smuggling the bomb onto the territory of another state that he seeks to hold at risk, which is not an easy proposition.

Making a nuclear threat or following through on such a threat would be an absolutely losing proposition for Hussein (and more importantly, Hussein would almost certainly recognize it as a no-win situation) for at least two reasons: 1) his expansionist designs would very quickly unite virtually all states in a severe response to Hussein's gambit; and 2) he would undoubtedly precipitate threats of total annihilation against him, his regime, and his country by the US and its closest allies. Hussein, despite his isolation, understands the prerogatives of power and has, in the past, recognized and followed the dictates of deterrence theory when confronted with the option of using lesser forms of WMD against opponents who possess superior capabilities. (Schwarzkopf) Hussein's highest priority is to ensure his own survival and so it is improbable that he would pursue a course that would almost certainly lead to his own destruction when dealing with nuclear weapons.

Hussein's most risky nuclear option would be to hand a bomb over to Islamic terrorists and cede to them control of the timing and location of an attack against the West. Given the presumed scarcity of Hussein's nuclear resources in any future scenario and his penchant for absolute control, it is highly questionable that he would hand this precious instrument over to an unpredictable group whose agenda he does not control and whose actions would not directly further his near-term aims. In any case, he would be leaving himself open to the most severe retaliation because of the risk of nuclear materials being traced back to Iraq; a prospect Hussein would not consider inviting.

This analysis does not argue for complacency in thwarting Iraq's quest for a nuclear weapon, but does underscore the importance of realistically assessing how the political landscape and relative balance of power would shift if the US failed to prevent Hussein from acquiring one. The point to be made is that Hussein would face much greater risk factors should he attempt to use nuclear blackmail and his past behavior indicates that he is susceptible to the logic of deterrence when confronted with an overwhelming preponderance of opposing force.

Another factor that the US must figure into its decision calculus is the cultivation of better relations and a more positive image in the Arab and broader Muslim worlds. Arab perception of the West is refracted through a prism of culture, history, and religion that makes mutual understanding a daunting task. But the effort must be made to cast US policy as "Arab-friendly" because the stakes are so high and the consequences of further radicalized publics in the Arab world could be devastating for US interests. Arab cynicism concerning the US role in the Middle East neutralizes much of American hard and soft power and places

stresses on Arab leaders who must increasingly balance their relations with the US against mounting internal pressure to address the frustration and anger toward Washington.

A major objective that has been discussed and debated intensely in recent months has been the aim of "regime change," removing Hussein from power in Iraq and installing a new leadership. As an explicit goal of US policy, toppling leaders, even those as unsavory as Hussein, is fraught with complications in terms of international law, US political relations with the international community, and coalition-building for the war on terrorism. The concept of state sovereignty has been codified through the UN Charter and other international legal instruments as a barrier against capricious state-to-state interference and a hedge against the "anarchic" tendencies of the international environment.

But sovereignty is not an absolute construct and may be offset by the recognized right of the international community to respond to threats to peace and security. Of course, responding to such threats assumes some consensus among key states on what constitutes a clear threat justifying action against a regime and such agreement is wholly lacking at present. So the most critical impediments to regime change are not legal barriers, which are surmountable through appeal to offsetting legal standards, but rather, practical and political considerations that would disrupt US coalition-building efforts against Iraq, inflame much of the Arab world, and potentially have far-reaching repercussions for US relations with many states that would see such actions as confirmation of rampant US unilateralism.

Further, and probably most telling, Hussein does not presently constitute an overriding threat to US national security. If Iraq were on the verge of actions that posed a grave threat to US vital interests by, for example, planning a terrorist attack on the US or preparing to invade Kuwait again, the urgency of the situation would justify swift and severe

US military action regardless of legal ambiguities or international misgivings. However, Hussein's brutality is currently confined within his own borders and his potential to do damage beyond Iraq is hypothetical given the international constraints on his behavior. Under these circumstances, regime change is not a prudent or properly-proportioned US objective because the course of action necessary to accomplish it in the near-term, namely ground invasion, would entail huge costs in people, resources, and unintended consequences for the US and Iraq (discussed further in the section below).

This assessment does not argue that the US must abandon regime change as its preferred end state for Iraq, but that it should not make eliminating Hussein an explicit, declaratory goal of its policy nor should it structure courses of action to directly accomplish this end in the foreseeable future. Public pronouncements tying US policy explicitly to regime change as its primary goal in Iraq complicate efforts to secure international support for the more pressing near-term purpose of dismantling Hussein's nuclear and other WMD infrastructure. If other states draw the inference that Hussein's disappearance from the scene is an implicit derivative of other stated US objectives, Washington should not object too strenuously, but policymakers should preserve the distinction between what the US would like to see happen and what it is presently willing to expend resources on to make happen.

MEANS AND WAYS OF IRAQ POLICY

How best to guard against Iraqi collusion with international terrorists, development of nuclear weapons, and destabilizing moves in the Persian Gulf region? All instruments of national power – diplomatic, informational, economic, and military -- have a role to play in an integrated and coordinated plan. The key determinant of an appropriate policy mix toward Iraq is how well it takes account of competing security priorities and avoids creating

new vulnerabilities by fixating on one problem – Iraq -- that is not the most urgent threat facing the US. The definition of "success" must incorporate the concept of resource conservation because US security challenges will not end with Iraq, no matter how decisively matters are resolved there. The US will be forced to keep an eye on other persistent threats and tailor its approach toward Iraq to avoid: 1) exhaustion or distraction of limited national security assets in addressing the global war on terrorism, North Korea, the India-Pakistan dispute, the Middle East peace process, etc.; and 2) too heavy-handed a pursuit of objectives in Iraq that damages the fabric of cooperation with other states essential to pursuing the full range of US security goals.

From an informational standpoint, the most important target of US efforts is the Arab and broader Muslim populations who have expressed the greatest skepticism toward US policy. The US should begin peeling away misconceptions about its policy pursuits by making use of independent media outlets with credibility in the Middle East, such as Al Jazeera. The message should focus on the US rationale for pursuing Iraqi compliance with UN WMD disarmament resolutions and Washington's desire to resolve its differences with Iraq in the least disruptive manner possible without compromising on the need to enforce UN and international standards regarding WMD development. US Embassies in Arab and other Muslim countries should reinforce this message through US Information Agency press releases and official statements to host country media outlets.

Economically, sanctions against Iraq have limited the resource flow to Hussein and forced him to resort to the black market as a major source of WMD dual-use equipment. If sanctions were lifted, Hussein's economic clout would rise significantly as a by-product of unconstrained oil sales. With this new purchasing power, his capacity to secure raw

materials and sophisticated technologies for his WMD program would expand even as US ability to monitor his imports declined because of the increased volume of Iraqi trade activity. In maintaining the sanctions regime, the US must seek to undercut charges that it is starving children and other vulnerable segments of Iraqi society by highlighting exemptions for Iraq's purchase of food and medicine with the proceeds from regulated oil sales.

Maintaining the smooth supply of oil from the Gulf is an important economic goal of the US under any circumstances. The complicated interrelationships of oil politics are underscored by the fact that the US is the largest importer of Iraqi oil *at the present time* and therefore is potentially vulnerable to a peremptory cut-off of Iraqi oil sales by Hussein. To guard against such a scenario, the US should re-confirm Saudi readiness to fill any gap in global oil sales caused by a disruption in the flow of oil from Iraq (Riyadh maintains spare pumping capacity of about 3 million barrels a day). (Morse and Richard, 28)

Diplomatically, the US should focus its energies on building international support for a program of escalating pressure against Iraq to force compliance with US and UN demands that Hussein surrender his WMD capabilities. Why is international coalition-building important? The UN imprimatur serves a legitimizing function and, in a broader sense, consultations to address international concerns quiet grumbling about US unilateralism and engender greater willingness to cooperate with the US.

The diplomatic lobbying must predictably focus on outreach to the permanent members of the UN Security Council, to other key US allies and partners such as Germany, Japan, and India, and to opinion-leading countries in the Arab and Muslim world like Egypt, Turkey, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. The basic message should stress that: 1) Iraq's pursuit of WMD, particularly nuclear weapons, represents a hazard to security in the

Middle East, and potentially to global stability; 2) the US will not rush to judgment on a resort to military force, but will wait and assess whether an inspection regime will work in disarming Iraq; 3) the US and the international community must preserve the option of using force to compel Iraq's compliance. Indeed, the credible threat of force may be the most effective tool in securing Iraqi cooperation and in obviating the need to actually use force.

Simultaneously, the US should intensify efforts at the UN to pass a Security Council resolution setting stringent standards for Iraqi compliance with WMD inspections. Those standards should mandate full access and no-notice inspections from the outset. The US should show willingness to compromise by deferring the issue of appropriate remedial action in the event of Iraqi obstructionism until a later date and another UN Security Council resolution; time is not of the absolute essence and Hussein's actions will provide a benchmark and guide in determining what types of follow-on actions are necessary.

A further, more sensitive track of US diplomatic activity should be pursued directly with the Iraqi government. To date, the US has evidently avoided direct communication with the Iraqi leadership, depriving the US of the means to deliver its message in an unmediated manner to the intended target. Disdain for a regime should not impede the use of all diplomatic channels to ensure that US requirements are understood and the potential consequences of Iraqi misbehavior are clear. Contact with an adversary is not a sign of weakness, but demonstrates a US determination to avoid being misunderstood, which is especially critical in the case of Iraq, where Hussein is cloistered from the free flow of information.

The contact with Hussein should lay out US redlines that he crosses at peril to his regime and his life. The US should clearly spell out the unacceptable behavior that Iraq must

avoid: 1) any material cooperation with elements of the global terrorist network; 2) any further efforts to acquire a nuclear capability or sustain his chemical and biological capabilities; or 3) any threats against Iraq's neighbor. The US should leave unspecified the exact consequences of transgression to sow maximum uncertainty in Hussein's mind and to leave the US maximum flexibility to tailor its response to the circumstances.

Further, the US, to provide incentive for Iraq to curb its behavior, must hold out some promise of an "improved" state of affairs for Hussein in return for cooperation. That improved condition would be a private US pledge not to invade Iraq and not to actively plan or directly participate in efforts to overthrow Hussein. Such a US commitment gives Hussein some assurance that he would not face a "do-or-die" confrontation with the US if he acted within prescribed limits. Voicing a nonnegotiable intent to remove Hussein could prompt an Iraqi leadership with no other recourse to engage in the very behavior that the US is trying to prevent: use of WMD or cooperation with al Qaeda.

Given the primary aim of constraining Hussein's quest for a nuclear capability, how does the military instrument best serve this policy end? Essentially, the US should posture itself militarily to maximize Hussein's doubts about Washington's ultimate intentions, lending credibility to claims that the US *might* occupy Iraq with ground forces. The US could accomplish this goal by continuing to: 1) move staff elements to Kuwait and Qatar; 2) improve airfields and command centers in Qatar and Oman; 3) conduct a stepped-up schedule of exercises in the region; and 4) pre-position additional stockpiles of equipment and ammunition. The overriding purpose of these measures would be to signal the seriousness of US intentions and to strengthen the hand of the UN weapons inspectors by underscoring the potential costs of Iraqi obstructionism.

In the event that Hussein blocks UN disarmament efforts over the next twelve months, the US should, after securing passage of an enabling resolution from the UN, proceed with direct targeting of Iraqi WMD sites. Such targeting, while likely to generate some international protests, would enjoy political cover as a result of US restraint during the extended diplomatic phase and from the proportional and focused nature of the attacks. To accomplish this mission, the US should exploit its information superiority, maneuver dominance, and precision engagement capabilities to launch a combination of cruise missile, and stealth aircraft attacks against suspected WMD locations. To maximize the effectiveness of such attacks, the US would need to launch a coordinated air campaign in advance of the WMD strikes to destroy Hussein's air defense assets --command and control links, radar sites, and missile launchers -- as well as the remnants of Hussein's air force to establish US air supremacy over Iraq.

In extremis, if the full effectiveness of this air campaign cannot be confirmed, the US should *consider* quick, hard-hitting tactical raids on critical WMD sites to collect data and complete demolition of partially destroyed sites. Such raids, while putting US military personnel at risk, could heighten Hussein's uncertainty without *directly* threatening his existence. Army Rangers accompanied by specialists who have expertise in WMD matters could perform these missions. These forces could take off from Kuwait and conduct helicopter air assaults or tactical airdrops onto the objectives if the physical layout of the WMD sites and disposition of Iraqi forces was favorable. Alternatively, US forces could seize or establish an airhead in the desert west of Baghdad and launch missions against WMD sites from that secure base. Attempts by Iraqi armored forces to attack this staging base would be the greatest potential threat, but this risk could be minimized by

simultaneously communicating to the Iraqis that the US will not target Iraqi military forces directly unless they move against the US staging area. If the Iraqis attack anyway, then US air supremacy should be used to devastate these forces, which would be easy targets as they approach the US position in the open terrain of the desert.

The insertion of US ground forces in even a limited operation within Iraq, as described above, is not desirable because it puts a significant number of US personnel within reach of Hussein's forces and narrows the margin of error for the operation. In addition, selective raids could be difficult for Hussein to distinguish from the opening stages of a full-scale invasion and therefore could prompt him to take drastic measures to counter the US presence on his soil, such as launching SCUD missiles with chemical or biological payloads. The best course would remain an air campaign supplemented by detailed feedback on the effectiveness of the strikes.

Iraqi forces as a whole are much reduced in offensive punch since the Gulf War. The Iraqi army, with a strength of 350,000, is about a third of its former peak size. The army has 17 regular divisions, six divisions of Republican Guard forces, and 15,000 Special Republican Guard personnel, who are entrusted with the defense of Baghdad and Hussein's hometown of Tikrit. (Gordon, A9) Iraqi mechanized, armored, and air forces have all suffered a serious decline in readiness as a result of UN economic sanctions. Most regular forces are not trusted and are deployed to the north and south, far from the capital to reduce the threat of a coup attempt in Baghdad. Regular forces also maintain internal security against the Kurds in the north and the Shia majority in the south. The chief Iraqi wild card at present is its estimated stockpile of 40 SCUD missiles. (Gordon, A9) However, on balance, the overall array of Iraqi military forces does not represent a formidable obstacle, especially

given the questionable loyalty of the majority of them. Coupled with the ethnic, religious, and demographic fault lines that lay exposed on the surface of Iraqi society, a US invasion to set a different course for Iraq is a tempting prospect.

However, under *virtually* no circumstances would a full-scale US invasion of Iraq serve US interests because such a course would imply a dramatic shift in policy ends. An invasion's costs, risks, and toll in lives could not be justified simply to destroy WMD capabilities, but would have to aim explicitly at removal of Hussein from power, installation of a successor regime, and long-term US occupation of Iraq until stability was restored. The open-ended burden of such a course is out of all proportion to the threat presently posed by Hussein. The specter of Clausewitz looms in the background cautioning against pursuing a military approach that is not properly matched to the intended and appropriate objective (Clausewitz, 585-586), which is containing Iraq. Further, in attacking the one thing that Hussein values above all else, namely his own survival in power, and refusing to settle for anything short of his destruction, the US potentially removes the most important constraint on Hussein's behavior and could trigger the spasmodic use of WMD that it seeks to avoid.

The concerns surrounding a potential US invasion are rife through all phases of the enterprise. First, at the operational level, a US invasion would likely begin with a substantial air campaign to destroy air defense sites and command, control, and communication assets that provide Iraqi forces the capacity to organize and fight. The US would then likely defeat Iraqi forces in detail outside the population centers of Iraq, establishing several staging bases and airheads around the country. Hussein and his most dedicated forces, probably at least 10-15,000 in number, could be expected to hole up in Baghdad and dare the US to come root them out, essentially holding the city hostage. Hussein and his loyalists would realize that

this was now a fight to the death and would have little incentive to resist unleashing every weapon under their control, including chemical and biological munitions.

The US would have two options in besieging Baghdad: wait it out to minimize casualties and damage on both sides or force the issue by attacking the city and trying to break the will of Iraqi forces to resist. Both courses are problematic. In the case of an extended siege, where deprivation and hardship could not be precisely targeted at Iraqi forces but would affect the whole population of Baghdad, the prospect of significant numbers of civilians dying of starvation and disease would have an electrifying effect among Arab and Muslim nations and most likely throughout the international community. General global misgivings about the war effort would be given concrete form in the media images of dying Iraqi civilians, lending credence to charges that the US is prosecuting a war against Islam.

The more likely scenario would be for the US to selectively attack key military targets in Baghdad with precision munitions to demonstrate the futility of Iraqi resistance and hopefully force an early surrender. Iraqi forces may crumble, but given the prospect of severe punishment and possibly death that awaits those forces most closely tied to Hussein, capitulation may not be an appealing option. (Gordon and O'Hanlon) If Iraqi opposition is prolonged, even precision munitions directed against a city will take a sizable toll on the noncombatant population.

Assuming the US will eventually eliminate Hussein and defeat Iraqi forces, Washington would then face the daunting and expensive task of a military occupation and a rebuilding process for the country that could take years and billions of dollars. This rebuilding would occur in a country with little tradition of representative government and no experience with unity except that imposed by a colonial power or assorted homegrown

strongmen. The centrifugal forces created by competing ethnic, tribal, and religious loyalties could transform Iraq into a Persian Gulf equivalent of the former Yugoslavia, with the indefinite requirement for an outside occupying power to quell ancient suspicions and hatreds. But in Iraq's case, US unilateralism would leave the task primarily to the US, with few countries willing to be saddled with an open-ended nation-building mission that they opposed in the first place. The ability of any democracy, and particularly the US, to muster the energy and sustained interest to reconfigure the socio-political institutions and relations of a country that is arguably beyond the understanding and broad self-identification of the American people, is a tall order.

Assuming the US did muster the will and resources for the undertaking, it is questionable whether the seed of representative institutions, rule of law, freedom of expression, and other hallmarks of the Western political experience would easily take root in soil as unfamiliar and potentially inhospitable as Iraq. Further, world-wide Muslim reaction to the spectacle of the US remaking an Arab society and picking winners among the various competing Iraqi opposition groups could inflame all the simmering resentments against the West, confirm suspicions of Washington's purported intent to eliminate Arab voices that resist US hegemony, and put US Arab allies in the uncomfortable and dangerous position of deflecting charges of being accomplices to US neo-colonial designs. In essence, the potential for greater regional instability and weakening of the US position in the Middle East as well as damage to American political influence and credibility globally would be significant. (Fallows)

From a US standpoint, threat prioritization and resource allocation issues could be adversely affected by an extended mission in Iraq, which has been projected to cost from $5 to $20 billion annually. (O'Hanlon) The ongoing drain of resources and manpower through

occupation duty could very easily siphon off limited resources from the more urgent struggle against global terrorism. The fixation on Iraq's WMD programs as a potential enabler for terrorists could also create tunnel vision in responding to other more probable sources of WMD materials and technologies, such as Russia, where poorly-monitored fissile materials and disgruntled scientists could potentially provide much more promising and accessible support.

Overall, invasion is a morass that would leave the US open to charges of overextension and misidentification of vital interests. It is difficult to identify circumstances under which the supposed benefits of an invasion would outweigh the costs, risks, and damage to US relations and reputation globally. Cooperation with al Qaeda or threats to employ nuclear weapons would be potential candidate scenarios for an all-out US response, but the case for the former has not been made conclusively and the case for the latter is a hypothetical one without the time urgency or sense of imminent danger necessary to galvanize the world community or US public opinion to endorse a full-scale invasion.

CONCLUSION

The global terrorist threat against the US has understandably colored the lens through which American leaders view international relations, leading to a focus on common interests with a wide array of countries – Russia, China, India, Pakistan – and a discounting of still significant differences with those countries. Conversely, US conceptions of other countries with past terrorist associations unrelated to al Qaeda, such as Iraq, have taken on a sinister new dimension. The decision to move against Iraq seems to partly reflect a quest by US decision makers to consolidate the spectrum of threats confronting them. First, in conflating the distinct challenge of Iraq with the global terrorist network, US officials are able to claim

progress in the war on terrorism while tightening the screws on America's longstanding nemesis in Iraq. This is especially important when victories against the elusive al Qaeda network are painfully slow, difficult to quantify, and not easily translated into dramatic media images for the public. Second, cautious monitoring of serious but latent international threats in the wake of 9/11 is a luxury that US leaders are not willing to indulge. In this sense, eliminating Hussein would hopefully remove an unpredictable variable from the US security equation and thereby simplify the challenges that threaten US vital interests.

The argument presented in this paper asserts that Iraq is a threat, but primarily a threat to regional stability that can be contained with coercive diplomacy and the measured application of force if Iraq fails to cooperate with demands from the US and international community to discard its WMD. Iraq's regional focus and personality-driven agenda do not seem to create sufficient motive for Hussein to combine efforts with global terrorism. The prospect of a nuclear-armed Iraq is a more realistic and troubling concern, but should also be manageable with diplomacy and a targeted resort to force when necessary. The temptation to invade a weakened Iraq would not simplify US security concerns, but would saddle the US with a long-term occupation and nation-building responsibility, drain precious resources from the more pressing war on terrorism, and damage US relations with a host of countries worldwide. Perversely, the unintended consequences of a full-scale military operation against Iraq would multiply the challenges to the US, not reduce them. The US does not presently have the luxury of pursuing military endeavors against idiosyncratic despots who can be contained by other means. Instead, the US needs to marshal its resources and apply them against the global terrorist network that poses the overriding threat to US security and survival for the foreseeable future.

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